Antibiotics are precious medicines. For decades they’ve allowed us to cure infections that were once among the leading causes of death in the United States. Antibiotics also paved the way for medical advances including chemotherapy, surgical procedures, and organ transplants.

Increasingly though, antibiotics are no longer working.

Nearly two-thirds of all medically important antibiotics sold in the United States are for use in livestock and poultry.

Antibiotics are often given to animals that aren’t sick on a routine basis to prevent disease that can be common in unsanitary, stressful, and overcrowded conditions.

Overuse breeds resistant bacteria, which can spread off farms and into communities via food, workers, the food production chain, and through contaminated water and soil.

Overuse is the problem

People get sick with infections that are difficult, and sometimes impossible, to treat with current antibiotics.

By 2050, drug resistant infections are expected to kill more people across the world every year than cancer kills today.

A new report released in The Lancet estimates that over 1.2 million people died globally in 2019 from antibiotic resistant infections.

Overuse is the problem
The European Union prohibits all forms of routine antibiotic use in farming, including preventative group treatments.

The American Academy of Pediatrics released a report stating “antibiotic agents should be used in food-producing animals only to treat and control infectious diseases and not to promote growth or to prevent disease routinely.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that about one in five resistant infections are caused by germs from food and animals.

A study by the Government Accountability Office concluded that resistant strains of three microorganisms that cause foodborne illness or disease in humans—Salmonella, Campylobacter, and E. coli—are linked to antibiotic use in animals.

Dr. Stuart Levy from Tufts University conducted a landmark study that linked routine antibiotic use in chickens to the proliferation of antibiotic resistant bacteria that can spread from animals to humans.

3 Ibid.